

Council President Noble, Majority Leader Reynolds, Minority Leader Teetsel, Members of the Kingston Common Council, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honor to stand before you once again on the first day of 2008 to deliver a message of accomplishment and hope for our community..the City of Kingston.

When we look at our City we see a reflection of American society in transition, from its pre-Colonial origins to its present day unfolding (Bradley 459): A society where once it was necessary to establish a stockade to protect us from the enemy. A society that was a trading post along the Hudson, which participated in the American Revolution for democracy, yet entertained slavery and eventually gave rise to the prominence of Sojourner Truth and the Underground Railroad.

There has always been an evolution, a constant change toward something better. A struggle between what was, what is and what shall be.

Our economic history has taught us hard lessons. We experienced the loss of our brickyards, our cement mills, our shipyards, our garment and high tech industries, the destruction and displacement of an entire section of our City under the guise of urban renewal. We note the national trend of Americans loosing jobs to overseas labor forces and American corporations moving abroad to such an extent that a "made in USA" label hardly exists. We have experienced a national value change resulting in a drug and criminal subculture that challenges all that is good. Yet we persevere.

I believe keeping our City economically strong is the most powerful tool in building and maintaining the quality of life for all Kingstonians. I believe the best way to fight crime is to prevent crime by helping people to see hope in

their lives. In the past six years, I have learned the best way to approach every initiative is to ask for your support. So I am calling on all Kingstonians for help. I am asking every nurse, minister, social worker, educator and police officer, every mom and dad, grandmother and grandfather, every man and woman, to give hope. Please go the extra mile for someone each day. The people of Kingston need you. I need each of you to do your daily work, extend a hand and give hope to others.

I have tried to lead this City by example. I have kept our City fiscally sound and economically strong and I am confident that with the help of this honorable body, we will continue to lay the groundwork necessary for keeping this trend going for many years to come.

Our government continues to be prudent, having raised taxes an average of 3.13% from 1994 to 2007, with an increase of 2.3% for homeowners in 2008. This modest increase was accomplished without layoffs or service cuts and in spite of increased operational costs.

Daily computer monitoring of departmental budgets and the establishment of a fund balance has increased our Moody's bond rating by three levels, which saved thousands of dollars in interest costs and facilitates borrowing if the need arises. This strict monitoring and accurate projection of expenses and revenues has resulted in a balanced budget with no borrowing needed to meet year end expenses. I have begun to view Kingston as a regional resource for the Mid-Hudson Valley.

Our public safety is assured by the Kingston Police Department and its participation in the URGENT Task Force, a regional approach to the problem of gangs and narcotics. In addition, we have made great strides by utilizing the Blue-Grey Program which facilitates joint patrols by State and City police. The patrols provided by

the Ulster County Sheriff's Department in all areas of the City, especially high crime areas have put many more police officers on the streets to deter crime.

According to **The Daily Freeman**, serious crime was down 29.3% in 2006 and for the first time in six years the number of serious crimes reported fell below 1000. We anticipate the 2007 crime statistics will be just as positive as our recent past indicators. This is a testament to not only regional crime fighting efforts but to our philosophy of neighbors rebuilding neighborhoods. This way of life has been embraced by our citizens and has become a community value of Kingston.

Public safety is also cared for by the vigilance of the Kingston Fire Department. They responded to five thousand emergency calls last year and provided CPR training to 800 citizens. They responded to hazardous materials emergencies through a shared service agreement with Ulster County, and at no cost to the city, will be acquiring a state of the art haz. mat. response vehicle valued at \$320 thousand dollars. Additional federal grants have allowed us to secure equipment to field test for unknown chemical and biological substances and it is valued at more than \$85 thousand dollars. I want to recognize the Kingston Professional Firefighters, under the leadership of Rick Salzman today, January 1, 2008, on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the career fire department.

Just as the police and fire departments have become a regional resource, our water department supplies the highest quality water available and is a source of revenue through its sale of excess water to neighboring communities. The City's Waste Treatment plant is now converting our sludge to be sold as fertilizer pellets.

In the future, I hope to broaden this idea of sharing resources, services and responsibility with other agencies and communities within our region.

The Kirkland Hotel, for example, represents an accomplishment that was made possible by the joint efforts of a local housing agency and city government. It stands as a beacon of history and holds fast to the idea that Kingston is a blend of past, present, and future.

A second example of history blending with practical use and cooperative effort is beginning to take shape as I speak. A preliminary plan is being formulated for our Carnegie building, the former library across the street. This City treasure will finally take its rightful place in modern Kingston history. The Kingston School District and the City will soon embark on a plan to make it a public center for technology and art.

I was humbled and gratified at the opening of the Darmstadt shelter this year. It brings me great joy to see people who are in need of temporary housing treated with dignity, in a comfortable shelter that compliments the neighborhood.

The completion of 97 Clinton Avenue is also a highlight for me, as it represents an example of seeing housing as a piece of the puzzle in solving the challenges that face some of our people in mid-town. This four unit condominium complex provides a unique opportunity for affordable home ownership and is the result of a cooperative effort between a not-for-profit agency and federal grants awarded to Kingston. Youth build and Habitat for Humanity also renovated a home at 169 Henry Street. Two weeks ago this home was purchased by a graduate of the youth build program. Andrea Hanshaw and her 3 children, your Hard Work, self Initiative are an

example to us all. Mountain Valley Manor, on Wilbur Ave, a 51 bed, assisted living facility, has opened and will provide an estimated 30 new jobs and housing for seniors. Birches our newest moderate income housing project provides 80 homes for residents. Kingston has done its share of providing entry level housing for the people of this area and we must now ask the County and other communities to do the same. I will continue to empower the people of this community to rebuild our city one House at a time.

Kingston will take its place as a thriving city in the Hudson Valley Region by experiencing economic expansion in the future. Grants and interest free loans are being used to repair sewer lines, upgrade the waste treatment facility and improve roads. We are using grant money to undertake brown field cleanups to make our city ready for a prosperous future. We are renewing the Pike Plan uptown, extending the Rondout bulkhead to increase waterfront access, and we are improving public transportation. Our award winning Nature Center and environmental programs will set the example for improvements in our parks and at Kingston Point Beach.

Recently, ground has been broken for the construction of a new building at the Kingston Business Park to house Armor Dynamics, a new business joining our community. Their product is already saving lives and protecting our military forces abroad. AVR/Hudson Landing, a new housing project in our community is finally a reality. As a result of the environmental review process, this development will provide public access and focus on a balance between open space and future progress. This exciting new neighborhood will enhance Kingston's unique position on the Hudson River.

The New York State Department of Environmental Protection is completing a new plant in midtown. They supply 235 permanent jobs and an additional 100 employees will be attending training sessions on regular basis. Walgreen's on Broadway, Quick Check, the conversion of manufacturing facilities to living and working units for artists and related businesses all contribute in part to the new economy of our City.

Our community development and promotion of the arts have not gone unnoticed. On February 26, 2007, BusinessWeek.com named Kingston as number 5 in the "Top Ten Places for Artists in America" and the New York Times noted Kingston as, "A Historic River City is Losing Its Backwater Reputation" in its April 20, 2007 edition. Once again, Kingston is in transition. And again we persevere.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the voters of Kingston for giving me the privilege to serve. I am grateful the people of Kingston understand that we are a "work in progress," and I am a leader who likes to see completion. I have come to realize, however, that it will take continued patience and vigilance to move Kingston forward.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless our great City of Kingston.